

INTRODUCTION:

If you really want to get to know someone, you have to spend time with them in different situations. You have to listen to what they say and watch what they do. Today, let's get to know Jesus better by looking at three key events in His life.

BODY:**1. THE CHAPTER**

I really must say that our weekly study of God's Word, lasting about forty minutes a time, is pleasurable. But there is one problem with it - the six days in-between. We as humans have a tendency to rapidly forget a majority of what we listen to, especially when we are studying a book for forty minutes a time only once a week. So, faced with this dilemma, we can either preach longer or review what we have gone through. Knowing this congregation could react, I think we'll review!

For example, look at how this chapter begins.

A. Chronologically: This chapter begins with the words "On the third day." The third day of what? Trace the chronology in chapter 1 and it becomes clearer. Verses 1 to 18 are a prologue to the book. Day one, 1:19; two, 1:29; three, 1:35; fourth, 1:43. The third day is the third day of His stay in Galilee.

B. Geographically: The place in question was at Cana in Galilee. Cana began his public ministry in an obscure corner of the country, remote from Jerusalem. He didn't begin on the highest hill of Rome with a loud speaker. This just goes to show that Jesus didn't seek honour from men, but rather to bring honour upon the lowly.

C. Analytically: As we take a more analytical, logical look at our passage, we find three incidents - involving wine, coins, and signs - each of them significant. At times we can read Scripture and miss the underlying message, principles, and applications. Today, we will take a closer look at each of these main events and discover their deeper significance.

2. THE ISSUES

The three incidents in this chapter - wine at the wedding, coins in the temple, and signs for the Jews - reveal different facets of Jesus' divine character.

A. WINE AT THE WEDDING. 1-11

The wedding is the scene of the first incident. It is possibly Jesus' sister's wedding or one of Mary's close friends, due to the importance of Mary's role there. She seems to take over.

First-century weddings differed greatly from today's. A one-year betrothal period preceded the actual ceremony. It was much more binding than modern-day engagements, only a bill or divorcement could break it. At the end of the wedding, everyone would go back to the bride's parents' house for toasts and speeches. Then a procession would set out from the bride's home to the couple's new home, and the dark roadway would be lit with oil lamps held by the wedding guests. On the way singing and music would accompany the newly married couple, and when they arrived, the wedding banquet began. This prolonged feast, mixing ceremony with celebration, could last as long as a week. Hospitality was extremely important - the hosts not only took great care to provide whatever the guests needed but they could actually be legally sued for not caring for the guests properly.

Seems also to be a very large wedding with about 2,400 servings of wine.

The incident.

Finally the wine ran out and Mary practically commanded Jesus to do something about it. Jesus responds in an interesting way, "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Almost sounds disrespectful, doesn't it? Jesus wasn't being disrespectful but He shows that now the chain of command has shifted from His mother to God. He has now entered into His public ministry; He has come of age and has matured, and Mary has to realise that their relationship is now to be different. God the Father is in charge and Jesus is obedient to His will. That's how it should be for every child; they are to be raised up by the parents, and at the right time of maturity, released to follow God themselves.

So Jesus performs His first miraculous sign - water was turned into wine. For wine, you need grapes and time - what happened here was a chemical impossibility. The transformation took place immediately. Not only was the wine replenished, but it had become "the best of wine" as the master of the banquet had exclaimed.

The issue.

- In 1980, wine buyers from all over the world gathered at the twelfth annual Heublein Rare Wine Auction in San Francisco. At the auction, a restaurant owner who had vowed to get "the finest bottle of wine in the world" spent \$31,000 for a vintage 1822 bottle of Chateau Lafite Rothschild. A well-heeled audience of more than three hundred wine connoisseurs gasped and applauded as the auctioneer slammed his gavel on the podium, ending the brisk, three-minute competition to capture the prized wine which was valued not only for its rarity but also its incomparable taste.

The fact is this: The world's finest wine was not made in the vineyards of France nor served in the finest international restaurant, but was made and served at an unpretentious wedding in Cana of Galilee - two thousand years ago. And that wine is valued to this day, not for its rarity but for what it reveals about its maker ... Jesus Christ. In fact, the real issue at the wedding was not the wine running out but the one who replenished it. Commentator Leon Morris highlights the meaning of Jesus' first sign:

This particular miracle signifies that there is a transforming power associated with Jesus. He changes the water of Judaism into the wine of Christianity, the water of Christlessness into the wine of the richness and the fullness of eternal life in Christ, the water of the law in the wine of the gospel.

Isn't that beautiful? Don't keep your focus on the wine or you'll miss the significance of what just happened. In an instant, Jesus' disciples saw proof of His divine power as Creator, and the One through whom all things were made" (1:3a). Chapter 1 verse 14 says that they saw His glory. Here in verse 11 it also says that He revealed the glory of God in this sign and His disciples put their faith in Him. I want to suggest to you that it is well with the scope of Jesus' power to transform the quality of our lives as well, making us fit vessels to display His glory through us. (Matt. 5:16)

B. COINS IN THE TEMPLE. 12-17

The Passover was the greatest of all Jewish feasts. It was a time of remembrance for when God delivered Israel from Egypt. By Jewish law, every male within fifteen miles of Jerusalem was required to make the journey to the sacred city for the celebration. And since every Jew dreamed of celebrating at least one Passover in Jerusalem, many more pilgrims came from outside that radius, swelling the city with as many as 2 1/4 million visitors each year. The Jewish officials saw an opportunity to put a sharp pencil to the situation and figured out how to make it a more rewarding stay - for themselves, that is, not for the travellers.

The incident.

When Jesus went to the temple courtyard, the scene infuriated him.

Every Jew over nineteen was required to pay a temple tax, which could only be paid in Galilean or sanctuary shekels - hence, the need for money changers. The corruption, however, was not in the system but in the exorbitant rate these unscrupulous financiers charged. Adding to the corruption was the way sacrifices were approved. A fee was charged to inspect all animals brought to the temple for sacrifice. Most of the time, the inspectors found the animal blemished in some way, disqualifying it as a legitimate offering. This forced the out-of-town traveller to purchase an "approved" animal at the temple for often ten to twenty times the fair market value. No wonder Christ was enraged. Instead of the appropriate devoted worship of God at the temple, he found a market place where money changers and sellers were shouting out their prices and merchandising their goods, turning the devoted place of worship into a desecrated place of wheeling-and-dealing.

The issue.

Jesus cleared the place out. The incident is clearly an account of removing from the temple those who were desecrating it. The issue is the sanctity of the temple, the dwelling place of deity. Today God dwells in the temple of our physical bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The implications of this are enormous.

- I love St. Augustine's exclamation when he was fleeing from the sinful temptation of a certain woman, he fell to his knees and cried out, "Oh Augustine, don't you know that thou carriest around God with you?"

The fact is that God dwells within us. We are not to allow the place where God dwells to become a house of merchandise - a loud, busy, deceptive place. It must be a place of prayer, a place of sanctity, a place of worship, where we can commune with God in spirit and in truth.

How about you? What do you allow to enter your "temple"? Does it enhance God's dwelling place - or does it defile and desecrate it? Is Christ trying to drive out anything from your temple? It may be certain habits, or a lifestyle that corrupts and perverts your character, or friendship with some who are destroying you spiritually. Believe me when I tell you this - Christ is the only one who can clean up your life! He has such a zeal for God's honour, so that if your temple is being desecrated, you can expect a cleansing visit from Christ. (FW1-7) Are you passionate for God's honour in your life?

C. SIGNS FOR THE JEWS. 18-25

The incident of Christ cleansing the temple brought Psalm 69:9 to the sensitive minds of the disciples. But the disgruntled merchandisers of faith - not so perceptive - wanted a little more positive identification. They wanted some authoritative sign.

The incident.

You see, Jesus not only overturned the money changers' business tables, He upended their mental tables as well.

The issue.

Sidestepping Jesus' demand to cleanse the temple and restore true worship, the Jews instead asked for a sign; what they needed, however, was salvation. Commentator Bruce Milne says that "it was a demand for the visible at the expense of the ethical." The real issue is not what they wanted to see; it was what they needed to believe. Their faith was of a shallow type which substantiated itself on signs. In other words, if there was no sign then there was no belief.

- Several years ago, TV presenter Mike Willisee hosted a program on supernatural, miraculous signs. On one occasion he filmed a phenomenon known as a stigmata, where a person experiences the pain and in fact manifests the same wounds Jesus received at the cross. After he saw a woman experiencing this, another TV reporter asked him if this incident has affected his view on God in any way. He replied that after seeing that with his own eyes, how could he not believe in God? The fact is that Mike Willisee's "conversion" rests not upon a repentant heart and a drawing near to God by the blood of Jesus, but rather upon a mystifying, unnatural and horrific sign that is totally unscriptural and undoubtedly a result of demonic activity, not God's mighty hand and presence.

Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (20:29). Don't base your faith in a sign or an experience, or else you will be an extremely weak believer; rather, build your faith on the solid foundation of the Word of God. Jesus of all people will

not be misled by mere outward professions of loyalty which do not involve true repentance and heart commitment.

The real sign has indeed been given: Jesus is alive - and we have the accurate testimony of this fact right here in the Word. His temple was destroyed and raised again in three days. What is revealed in His sign is His resurrection power. Eph. 1:19-20 tells us that this same power is at work in us who believe. It is this very power that can overcome death, darkness, and hell in your life. It can bring the victory that you need so much in your life right now. Trust in Jesus right now and that power will be at work to bring light and life to your existence.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, let's step back from these incidents and view them from a distance. What we see is that Christ is the focal point of them all. In changing the water into wine, Jesus' glory is central. In the cleansing of the temple, it's His holiness and authority. In the raising of the temple, it's His resurrecting power. We, too, need to focus on Jesus. In fact, our most desperate need is to become occupied with Christ. What a difference this would make in Christianity if Christ's followers were all focused on Him. A. W. Tozer observed,

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers met together, each one looking toward Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become "unity" conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Indeed, our most desperate need is to become occupied with Christ.

As we bow our heads before the Father, I want you to think of a house which has many rooms. In the house there is a kitchen where meals are prepared and where we feed ourselves. In the kitchen of the house of your life, what are you feeding yourself? What are you growing upon? What kind of food is in your diet? What are you reading and viewing? As we walk on we will pass the living room, the bedrooms, and of course, the closets. What about those closets? We like to keep them shut, don't we? We want to keep the keys to those doors. What I'm trying to say is this: Give Christ all the keys to your life. Let Him invade the every room, cleaning out the trash and filling it with the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray.